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Mapping freedom in academia

Research Objectives

The Mapping Funds project monitors the support networks available to at-risk scholars.

Detail

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Bio

Associate Professor Asli Telli Aydemir holds a PhD in media and communications studies from a dual American and Swiss programme, where her dissertation focused on the changing nature of contemporary cities and urban spaces. She taught and advised international graduate students in numerous universities in Turkey, Switzerland, Malta, France, Germany and the US. She has published widely in competent outlets on participatory cultures, knowledge commons, political communication and platform resistance. She is currently an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation-Phillip Schwartz Fellow at Locating Media Program of Uni-Siegen, Germany. You may check her personal page <https://aslitelliaydemir.academia.edu> for further academic work.

Funding

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Collaborators

- Academics for Peace: <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/English>
- NRW Mobile Solidarity Academy: <https://mobilesolidarity.com/>
- Off-University: <http://off-university.com/>
- New University in Exile Consortium: <https://newuniversityinexileconsortium.org/>

References

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- Aydemir, A.T., & Gümüş, H. (2019) Mapping funds and support networks for at-risk scholars: Case of Turkey, Executive summary.
- Bilirim, A. (2019) Turkish civil society: Declaration on the state of the internet. EDRI. Available at: <https://edri.org/turkish-civil-society-declaration-on-the-state-of-the-internet/> [Accessed 01/01/2020]
- <https://globalvoices.org/2019/06/26/turkeys-academics-for-peace-defend-their-beliefs-from-prison-cells-and-exile/>
- Criminalizing Hope for Peace. Forum Wissenschaft April 2019 issue. <https://www.linksnet.de/artikel/47694>

Personal Response

What inspired you to set up Mapping Funds?

/// A crackdown on academic freedom is being orchestrated on an increasing scale in different parts of the world. Intervention by state authorities, police violence and attacks by extremist groups are dominating the global agenda. In this picture, I thought collaborating with colleagues towards university beyond borders is essential and could be therapeutic in time. The first step we took was with Guniversite (www.guniversite.com), an online learning initiative in Turkey; the second step, my move to Germany as a scholar in exile. This second step could have caused alienation; instead I chose to cooperate with other exiled scholars to map freedoms in academia. Our next step is to expand the dialogue; we hope to save exile knowledge to imagine a peaceful world of no borders with engaged students, intellectuals and knowledge workers. //

Mapping freedom in academia

The 'Mapping Funds' project is creating maps based on collaborative and crowdsourced (public contribution) information as an active way to support the scientific activities and studies of at-risk scholars. These scholars are encountering constraints on their research activities due to the restrictive regimes they live and work in. The constraints include travel bans, deportations, arrest, prosecution and imprisonment. The project began in 2016, and Dr Asli Telli of the University of Siegen is project supervisor. Initially focused on academia in Turkey, the project's scope has spread to include scholars working in the Middle East as well as Central and Eastern Europe who experience restrictions on academic freedom.

The initial stage of the Mapping Funds project was completed in 2018 and this has tracked and mapped-out the supportive network of relationships that exist between universities, research institutions, civil society organisations, and public and private donors. The project began in Turkey with the group Academics for Peace, but its primary motivation, the protection of freedom in academia and exile knowledge, has found solidarity across the world.

The project also has broader relevance: members of Turkish civil society experience restricted access to websites, with the number of blocked sites exceeding 110,000. For example,

Within Turkey, thousands of academics are in a state known as 'civil death': many interlocking rights are withheld.

Wikipedia, the world's largest online encyclopaedia has not been accessible for over two years, and censorship persists despite the European Court of Human Rights ruling against this denial of access. Turkey has fallen behind in international development indices, and the digital divide that has been created through censorship impacts access to informational resources in schools, lifelong learning facilities, and among citizens using the internet in daily life. However, in a promising development, Turkey's highest court recently ruled that the ban violated citizens' freedom of expression.

HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY

As well as mapping support mechanisms, the project also monitors

improvements and any gaps in funding that impact at-risk scholars. Travel restrictions, dismissals, and expulsions from study create challenges for those working in academia, and despite the continued blocking of some websites, the internet also offers solutions. The project is drawing on the enabling technological opportunities the internet provides to adapt and sustain support for scholars. Those who are not able to leave their country and are not permitted to work or study at one of their home universities can receive online mentoring, free access to online libraries, or opportunities to work via online lectureships. Harnessing the power of technology as an enabler for academics is at an early stage but

is a viable means to empower scholars who face travel and work bans.

CREATING THE MAPS

The first steps in the project entailed compiling a confidential database using data from institutional websites. The next step was to visualise the data using the online collaborative mapping platform Graph Commons. This platform was chosen as it is familiar to Turkish scholars and students. Based on the available data, the first map to be created – 'Support networks of scholars at risk' (see Figure 1) – is publicly accessible and it provides an overview of the support networks that exist and which can be contributed to. The map helps to illustrate who and where the key

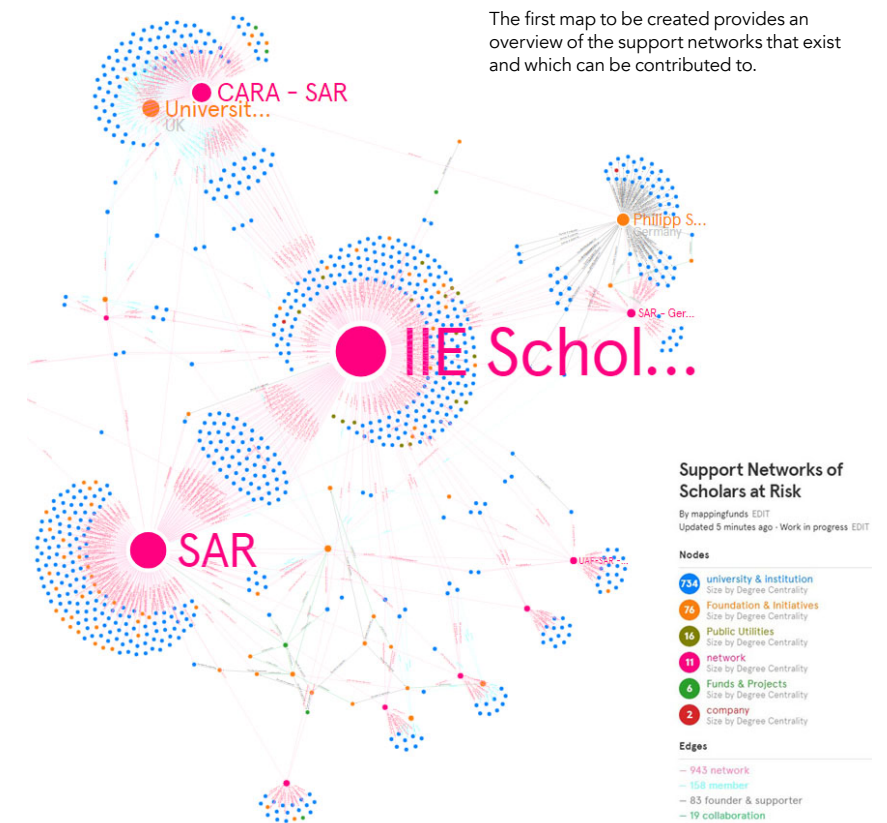


actors are, depicting those who have bridging roles between clusters and peripheral sites, and visually portraying the growth and reach of the network and the complexity of relationships.

A second map 'Funds for Endangered Researchers from Turkey' acts as a route map, which shows the funds and the related institutional support network. It contains personal profiles and is therefore only available to collaborators because of confidentiality and safety issues. This map is a work-in-progress that has been added to as information, such as any support they could provide, is gathered through email correspondence with institutions. It acts as a guide document for supporters, showing where there are gaps in research areas or positions and types of support. It also provides key information for at-risk scholars in Turkey, acting as a platform so they can identify and reach out to available support. Together, these maps are significant, interactive documents in the struggle to establish and develop support networks for scholars, including those experiencing threats, persecution, and civil death.

CIVIL DEATH

Within Turkey, thousands of academics are in a state known as 'civil death': this phrase describes the many interlocking rights that are withheld. The losses include losing their university job, being barred from working as a public employee, and having their freedom of movement withdrawn. For scholars who may have been awarded a Fellowship or other type of support in another country, a travel ban means that they



The first map to be created provides an overview of the support networks that exist and which can be contributed to.

cannot leave to take up the position. Inevitably, these privations of liberty lead to unemployment, blacklisting, and a struggle to cover basic living costs.

Through the monitoring of networks, the Mapping Funds project ensures the preservation and furthering of academic freedom, the liberty to pursue critical thought, and the sharing of knowledge. The maps promote academic solidarity, offering information on existing collaborations, and acting as a guide document that strengthens relationships among supporters by

creating an eco-system of information and help for scholars. The visual format of the maps and the collaborative, democratic sharing of information encourages further expansion of support by identifying gaps, so that those who need help do not get left behind. Recently, Mapping Funds researchers have begun collaborating with The University in Exile Consortium (UIE) for an open-access, indexed and searchable sourcebook of support mechanisms attributed to at-risk scholars; it will be available on the UIE website in early 2020.



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